

Issues Facing the Work Force in the New Millennium

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the United States today and will likely remain so through 2020. This is a major concern for all of us at NASA, our families and friends. Though the death rate from cardiovascular disease has declined over the past decade through aggressive treatment, it is still a leading cause of illness and disability. The costs, both human and financial, are staggering. Some of the ancillary effects of cardiovascular disease on the work force include increased employee absenteeism, increased health care costs, declining performance and decreased productivity. Many of the risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease, such as hypertension and obesity, can be reduced significantly by lifestyle changes. Simple changes like increasing exercise, improving diet, and having regular medical check-ups can dramatically improve your level of risk.

Over the next decade, the demographics of the work force will continue to change. By the year 2005, 20 percent of the national workforce will be over the age of 55. At NASA, our aging work force may lead to increased healthcare costs, incidence of illness, and time lost from work.

Many of us have seen this trend already. As the expected life span increases and the work force ages, there will be an increased demand for employees to make decisions for the care of elder family members. In 1998, it was estimated that 25 percent of employees were providing elder care assistance. The impact on the workplace can be significant in terms of time lost

from work, missed work days, unscheduled leaves and decreased efficiency and productivity due to emotional stress.

Workplace programs and policies to improve employee health and support work and family issues can potentially reduce absenteeism, alleviate stress, increase employee morale, loyalty and productivity. For NASA's future, it will help us attract and retain high quality employees. We, NASA, need to address the behavioral and environmental risk factors and make positive steps toward improving each and every employee's quality of life.

NASA Actions

Principal Center

- Develop a Technical Bulletin to provide Centers with guidelines for promoting good nutrition in the workplace – *In Progress*
- Submit NASA Procedures and Guidelines for Smoking Cessation – *Task Complete*
- Provide health resources on web site – *Task Complete*
- Send out books on providing for Aging Parents – *Task Complete*
- Distribute information on how to reverse heart disease to all NASA employees—*Task Complete*

NASA Centers

- Provide an EAP counselor for employees experiencing parental support and other home and work issues
- Provide a fitness center
- Provide a variety of health promotion and education programs
- Provide quality health maintenance programs through physical examinations and interventions

Background

One of the best ways to lower the risk of developing cardiovascular disease is by exercising. Only 22 percent of the U.S. population exercise the recommended 30 minutes, 5 days a week. Physical inactivity contributes to the development of obesity, high blood pressure and reduced levels of high density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol all risk factors in the development of cardiovascular disease (heart attacks and stroke) and diabetes.

Over the past decade the intake of dietary fat and cholesterol has decreased, but it still remains above the recommended levels. Approximately 20 to 30 percent of the U.S. population is at least 30 pounds overweight as compared to only 15 percent in 1965 when the population was generally more physically active. Through nutritional and fitness awareness we may be able to reinforce or make changes to better nutrition and fitness at home.

Data from the National Institute on Aging show that by the year 2005, 20 percent of the workforce will be over the age of 55. In the years of 2000 to 2010, 55 to 64 years of age will be the fastest growing age group in the workplace.

Statistics from Families and Work Institute show that in 1998, 25 percent of employees provided some level of elder care. An estimated 11 hours per week was spent on issues of elder care and only 1 in 4 employees had access to resources and referrals at work.